

Great Allegheny Passage

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA, TO CUMBERLAND, MARYLAND

With 100 continuous miles of trail open in Pennsylvania from McKeesport to Meyersdale and an additional 20 miles scattered throughout the Pittsburgh area, the Great Allegheny Passage is the longest multi-purpose rail-trail in the East. When the project is completed in 2005, the rail-trail will offer a total of 150 miles of non-motorized, nearly level trail between Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Cumberland, Maryland, with a 52-mile spur to Pittsburgh International Airport. At Cumberland, the Great Allegheny Passage will link with the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Towpath, creating a 300-mile off-road route between Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.

The Great Allegheny Passage allows hikers, bicyclists, cross-country skiers and people with disabilities the opportunity to discover the region's spectacular river gorges, mountain vistas and sweeping cityscapes. The trail leads travelers through the Allegheny Mountains making use of refurbished railroad bridges and tunnels on their journey along waterways, unique rock formations and wildlife areas.

RELATIONSHIP TO SURFACE TRANSPORTATION

The tremendous support of elected officials, state and federal agencies, hundreds of volunteers and thousands of trail users has been crucial to the development of the Great

Allegheny Passage, a project similar in scale to an interstate highway project. A public-private partnership between the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PENNDOT) and the Allegheny Trail Alliance (ATA), a coalition of seven trail organizations in Southwestern Pennsylvania and Western Maryland, manages this comprehensive project and has significantly contributed to its success.

PENNDOT's progressive thinking, combined with more than \$17 million in Transportation Enhancements (TE) awards, facilitated the development of the former railroad corridors into the current rail-trail system. ATA President Linda Boxx reports, "When we needed complicated sections of trail completed the TE money was critical. Without it, the full trail network just would not happen." The Great Allegheny Passage, a destination unto itself, is also viewed as a



GREAT ALLEGHENY PASSAGE



major transportation corridor for the residents of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia.

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS

According to a 1998 ATA economic-impact study, the direct economic impact of the Great Allegheny Passage exceeded \$14 million a year – even though the trail was only half finished at that time. The study, based on surveys of trail users and local businesses, recorded more than 350,000 visitor trips on the trail each year with users spending \$12.01 to \$15.33 per person per trip. The study also estimated that trail users spent between \$5.4 and \$14.1 million near six trailheads. In addition, annual expenditures on bicycles and related equipment, attributable to the trail over the prior two years, were between \$8.9 and \$12.2 million. The study suggests a total, direct annualized impact of \$14.3 to \$26.5 million.

The rail corridors that once carried freight are now carrying thousands of rail-trail users through the cities and towns of Southwestern Pennsylvania. In the Allegheny County town of Boston, the high volume of trail users encouraged some local

residents to become entrepreneurs. In 1998, four new trail-oriented businesses opened in Boston, including bike rentals, restaurants, a bed-and-breakfast and a novelty shop.

In Confluence, one of the project's first trailhead towns, the trail has encouraged the development of several new businesses including three new restaurants, two new bed-and-breakfasts and a bicycle rental program at the local video store. In addition, several homes have been purchased and renovated by trail users, some as primary residences and others as vacation homes. As a result, real estate values in Confluence are increasing.

The ATA is providing additional assistance to communities along the trail by developing the Trail Towns program, an economic redevelopment program similar to the Main Street USA program. Trail Towns supports bicycle and pedestrian projects in an effort to encourage trail tourism. A \$50,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources will help fund the program. Trail Towns awards matching grants to towns for crosswalks and other small bicycle and pedestrian improvements. The three towns currently selected

for the pilot program are Meyersdale, McDonald and West Newton.

Clearly, the Great Allegheny Passage has positively affected the economies of the communities it passes through. Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy is already noticing the affect of the trail on surrounding communities. After riding most of the trail network, he remarked, "I was able to see first hand the benefit that this project brings to communities along the way." U.S. Congressman John P. Murtha (PA – 12th District) expounds on the trail's benefits, "The trail is already attracting a lot of people, and we're just starting to market it. It's a major asset for our region, not only because of the tourist dollars it's attracting but also because it's a key piece of our economic rebuilding efforts." Whether it

is a realtor advertising properties in close proximity to the Great Allegheny Passage Hiking and Biking Trail, a local restaurant installing bike racks for the convenience of its patrons, or a community-sponsored event centered around the trail, the trail network preserves a valuable transportation corridor while providing a wealth of benefits to communities along its way.

FUNDING

Total Project Cost: \$41,944,244
Federal TE: \$17,579,578
Non-federal Match: \$24,364,666

CONTACTS

Brett Hollern, Allegheny Trail Alliance,
814-445-1544, hollernb@co.somerset.pa.us

Allegheny Trail Alliance, 1-888-ATA-BIKE,
www.atatrail.org

Dan Accurti, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation,
717-783-2258,
daccurt@dot.state.pa.us